



RELEASE: INAUGURATION OF THE RECOWA PEACE COMMITTEE

Apr 11, 2018

ABUJA, NIGERIA -

INAUGURATION OF THE RECOWA PEACE COMMITTEE

Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God' says the Lord in Matthew 5:9.

RECOWA Peace Committee (REPCO) held its first meeting from April 10th to 13th, 2018 in Abuja (Nigeria). The general theme of the meeting was "The Catholic Church and Peace in West Africa: the contribution of RECOWA". The meeting which culminated in the official inauguration of the Committee was preceded by a one day workshop on the topic "Prevention, Mediation, Resolution and Transformation of Conflicts in West Africa".

Work progress

Times of prayer, reflection, sharing and interaction filled the one day workshop. The RECOWA Peace Committee (REPCO) thanks, first most, God for the growth and vitality of the Church in West Africa, despite the many challenges on the road to justice and peace, stability and development.

Pastoral concerns

Areas of pastoral concerns for the Catholic Bishops of West Africa include among others the following:

- The prevention, mediation, resolution and transformation of conflicts in the region.
- The promotion of justice and peace, democracy, stability and development through good governance.
- The political tensions caused by the manipulation of constitutions and the electoral processes that weaken the people's participation in governance.
- The politicians who take advantage of ethnic and religious divisions to achieve their selfish desires.
- The huge costs of elections in the region due to bribery for voters and post-election arbitrations.

Achievements

We thank our political leaders in the region for the relative peace and stability of the past two decades. We especially express our deep gratitude to the ECOWAS Commission, for the positive results achieved in terms of peaceful political transition in many countries of the region.

Challenges to deal with

- Tumultuous political transition with its corollary of instability;
- Religious intolerance that has turned into extremism and terrorism;
- Nomadic herdsman often associated with acts of rape, murder, destruction of farms, abductions and conflicts.
- Land grabbing and its consequences of unemployment, migration and rise of poverty among our populations.

Exhortations

Faced with these challenges, we urge the faithful to persevere in the faith and to be more consistent in the exercise of their responsibilities.

We call on politicians to promote good governance and equity in the management of the common good, respect for

human rights and reject the culture of death.

We urge all men and women to rediscover their common humanity and vocation as children of the one God.

We extend our encouragement to women to live up to their vocation as mothers and educators of consciences. We also invite them to actively resist the culture of death and contribute to build a society where peace, tolerance, dialogue and acceptance of others reign.

We urge young people not to lose hope but to believe in the possibility of thriving in their lives and achieve their happiness in the region.

We reiterate our deep sympathy to the families bereaved as a result of terrorist attacks, religious intolerance, and political violence.

2019 and 2020 will witness many elections in many countries, especially presidential elections. We encourage all political actors and the people in the various countries to preserve the democratic gains in order to consolidate peace.

Members of RECOWA Peace Committee

On the proposals made by the National and Inter-territorial Conferences, the following have been appointed by the sixth Standing Committee meeting of RECOWA held in Praia (Cape Verde) from 26th to 31st January 2018. They constitute the RECOWA Peace Committee. They are:

1. Sir Emmanuel HABUKA BOMBANDE, Accra (Ghana) (Excused)
2. Mr. Elysé OUEDRAOGO, Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso)
3. Rev. Fr. Innocent JOOJI, Abuja (Nigeria)

4. Mme YOUM Marie Noëlle D. SENE, Thiès (Sénégal)
5. Mgr Nicodème BARRIGAH-BENISSAN, Evêque d'Atakpamé (Togo) (excused)

N.B. Two more women are yet to be appointed.

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS

1. Most Rev. Lucius IwejuruUGORJI, Bishop of Umuahia (Nigeria) (President of the Committee)
2. Arlindo Cardinal FUTARDO, Evêque de Praia-Santiago (Cabo Verde)
3. Philippe Cardinal OUEDRAOGO, Archevêque d'Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso)
4. John Cardinal ONAIYEKAN, Archbishop of Abuja (Nigeria)

The RECOWA Peace Committee is a High Level Mediation Body with a purpose, goal and objectives:

PURPOSE OF COMMITTEE

The RECOWA/CERAO Peace Committee (REPCO/COCEP) shall play a key role in ensuring that the rights and dignity of men, women, youth, children, and the most vulnerable among our communities are respected and protected above all.

The committee shall be ready to address the political crises within the region before they escalate to major conflict.

RECOWA/CERAO believes that such a Committee at the regional level shall be a new starting point to resolving most of the political crises surrounding elections and good governance in West Africa.

GOAL OF THE COMMITTEE

To influence national and regional policies with regards to Peace, Reconciliation and Inter-Religious Dialogue based

on the Social Teaching of the Church, especially on the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortations: *Ecclesia in Africa* and *Africae Munus*.

OBJECTIVES OF THE COMMITTEE

The main objective of the RECOWA/CERAO Peace Committee (REPCO/COCEP) (hereafter referred to as REPCO/COCEP) shall be to support the Catholic Church in West Africa in her pastoral and advocacy work in addressing the political, socio-cultural and interreligious crises within the region before they escalate to major conflicts.

In addition, the specific objectives of the Committee shall be:

- a. To assist the Bishops on policies and procedures; and to suggest appropriate means of supporting the implementation of RECOWA/CERAO Strategic Plans on Peace, Justice and Social Cohesion; and the ECOWAS Peace and Security Framework;
- b. To serve as a Forum for concertation between the leadership of the Church in West Africa, the Governments and the ECOWAS Commission, the Political Parties, Civil Society Organisations, Religious Leaders, and Majors Development and Peace Actors within the region of West Africa on issues related to conflicts, peace and security;
- c. To provide services to the ECOWAS Commission for a peaceful, respectful, and harmonious coexistence in our region through the RECOWA/CERAO;
- d. To complement the Advocacy Work and the Political Engagement of RECOWA/CERAO on Non-Violence and Peace Building within the region.

So the Committee's aims are:

To offer the help of the Catholic Church in the region so that the exercise of power aims at improving the living

conditions of the people.

To help political leaders in the region to make the individual and collective sacrifices necessary so that politics finds its letters of nobility for the happiness of men and women of the region.

At the end of our stay, we express with gratitude, our appreciation to His Eminence John Cardinal Onaiyekan, Archbishop of Abuja, His Excellency Antonio Filipazzi, Apostolic Nuncio in Abuja, Augustine Akubeze, Archbishop of Benin City and President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria, for their solicitude and interest given to our meeting. We will keep in long remembrance the concern and interest manifested by His Excellency Jean Claude Brou-Kassi, President of the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and all the Ambassadors from ECOWAS Countries represented with the Federal Republic of Nigeria. We thank the Clergy and Religious, Christ lay faithful, the Secretary General and the Staff of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria for the various services put in place. We thank Reverend Father Joseph Aka, the Secretary General and his organising committee.

Our thanks go especially to the CAFOD not only for sponsoring this workshop but also for its effective presence at our side in the person of Mr. Kelechi Emeh. We extend the same thanks to the faithful and people of goodwill who have supported us through prayer and through their various contributions.

Prayer

We raise our prayer to God, the Father of Mercy; may he give us his Holy Spirit to lead us on the way of true and lasting peace. We join our prayer to the Queen of Peace, our Heavenly Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary to intercede for our countries; that families may live in peace, cohesion for a stable, just and prosperous region.

Abuja, on April 12th, 2018

+Ignatius A. KAIGAMA

President